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ABSTRACT

Faculty attitudes toward older learners were studied using an adaptation of Kogan's (1951) attitude scale and methodology. Forty-nine faculty members from various colleges and universities in Ohio and Indiana were subdivided into two groups: those who had taught in a structured higher education experience aimed at people over 60 years of age and those who had not. Results indicate that younger faculty members were less critical about older adults as learners and potential learners than are older more experienced faculty members. Older faculty members who had taught a high number of classroom contact hours with adult learners expressed less positive attitudes toward the capabilities of older adults to be successful college students. Younger faculty members maintained few negative sterotypes of older adults as learners. Further revision of specific item pairs of the survey is being pursued. Survey items and the responses of the four subgroups are included. (SW)

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FACULTY ATTITUDES TOWARD THE OLDER ADULT LEARNER

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Carol Barnes

Access to higher education for older adults has become an increasingly important consideration for universities, government, and the older adults themselves. For universities the decline in the proportion of the traditional student population means a potentially serious reduction in consumers of education and concomitant loss of revenue, reduction of staff, decline of facilities, and ultimate stagnation. The concern of government has come in part from these same considerations and in part as a result of legislation which prohibits age discrimination in a variety of contexts. One set of alternatives to enrollment declines has been an emphasis on recruitment of "new" students--minorities, women, and persons outside the traditional student age group, including retired older adults. As the population of the United States ages, the median educational attainment of retiring persons constantly rises. Persons with moderate to high educational experience are more apt to view education both as a recreational activity and as something desirable in its own right.

The various barriers to higher education faced by older adults can be categorized as physical, institutional, and attitudinal (cf. Barnes, 1979). This research investigates aspects of the institutional and attitudinal barriers---the attitudes of faculty members toward the older adult as learner. Earlier investigators, including Tuckman and Lorge (1953, 1954,

1958), Kogan (1961), Eisdorfer and Wilkie (1967), Eisdorfer and Altrocchi (1961), Golde and Kogan (1959), Harris and Associates (1975), Thomas and Yamamota (1975), have carried out extensive research dealing with attitudes toward older people. Of particular interest here is the modified Likert scale developed by Kogan (1961) for attitude measurement. The present research adapts Kogan's scale and methodology to the setting of higher education. Rather than assessing student attitudes toward older people, this research is structured to assess faculty attitudes toward older learners.

The results reported here were collected from a preliminary, pilot study utilizing a relatively small number of respondents. It had several objectives, including verification of the survey instrument, as well as the collection of usable data. The results presented here must be considered preliminary, but they should be indicative of the large-scale study to follow.

Earlier studies indicate that persons who had previous direct experience with a variety of older adults tended to be less negative in their attitudes toward aging and the aged (cf. Kastenbaum and Durkee 1954, Sadowski 1978, Tuckman and Lorge 1958). Since there appears to be no reported research on faculty attitudes toward older adults as learners, the objective of this study is to investigate the attitudes of two groups of faculty to determine the impact of direct experience with older learners on stereotyping of older adults by higher education faculty.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The subjects were 49 faculty members from various colleges and universities in Ohio and Indiana. The faculty were subdivided into two groups. One group (G-I) consisted of faculty members who had taught in the Elderhostel program at their respective colleges during the previous summer, 1979 (N = 28, mean age = 50, age range = 27-70). Elderhostel offers a structured higher education experience aimed specifically at people over sixty years of age. Participants take specially designed classes, live in dormitories, and are immersed in the college environment for a one or two week period. A second group (G-II) consisted of faculty from the same colleges and same departments who had never taught in a program aimed specifically at older adult learners (N = 21, mean age = 40, age range = 26-66). The samples were comparable in terms of age ranges, but relatively different in mean age.

In terms of number of years in teaching the samples were also comparable. G-I ranged from 4 to 50 with a mean of 22. By comparison G-II ranged from 2 to 40, but the mean for this group was only 14 years. Where the two groups differed widely was on the number of classroom hours of contact with adults 60 years old and older. G-I had a mean of 93 contact hours whereas G-II had a mean of 6.

Instrument

The survey instrument was adapted from Kogan's "old people" attitudinal scale developed in the early 1960's. The survey instrument included 38 items, 19 negative and 19 positive paired statements. There were, thus, 19 matched positive/negative pairs. The pairs were separated in such a way that positive and negative forms of a single statement never

appeared in sequence; beyond that the order of statements was randomized. The paired sets of statements express negative and positive attitudes toward older people as learners--primarily in the university setting. Five pairs reflect stereotypic attitudes toward older adults.

A five point Likert scale was developed with the responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." A neutral position of "undecided" was included as the midpoint in the range of choices.

The items were clustered into three general categories based on their manifest content. Item Pairs 2, 10, 14, 18, and 19 are the five pairs concerned with commonly held negative stereotypes of older persons--particularly focusing on intergenerational conflicts. Item Pairs 3, 4, 5, 11, 15, and 16 address the learning capabilities of older adults. The adaptability of older people to the college environment is assessed by Item Pairs 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, and 17.

Results and Discussion

Table I presents the questionnaire tabulations in terms of percentages for each group. There is a great deal of difference between the two groups regarding classroom contact hours in association with older adults. As had been expected, 90 percent of the G-II group had less than ten classroom contact hours with older learners in contrast to 50 percent of the G-I group who had eleven or more hours of contact. The mean number of contact hours for G-I was 93 while the mean number of contact hours for G-II was six.

The respondents in G-II had taught a fewer number of years as well. Of the G-II respondents, 86 percent had taught 20 years or less whereas 47 percent of the Elderhostel instructors had 21 or more years of teaching experience.

TABLE I QUESTIONNAIRE TABULATIONS

Demographic Information		Group I	Group II
Classroom contact hours with half or more of students age 60 or older:			
0		0	76%
1- 10		50%	14%
11- 50		29%	10%
51-100		7%	0
100 plus		14%	0
	TOTAL	100%	100%
Number of years taught:			
1-10		22%	48%
11-20		32%	38%
21-30		18%	5%
31-40		14%	10%
41-50		14%	0
	TOTAL	100%	100%
Age of respondent:			
25-30		7%	14%
31-40		25%	53%
41-50		22%	14%
51-60		14%	14%
61-70		32%	5%
	TOTAL	100%	100%

TABLE I (continued)

MATCHED NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE PAIRS

Attitude Item Response	Group I (N=28)		Group II (N=21)	
	Percent Who Agree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Disagree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Agree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Disagree Strongly or Somewhat
1 N[a] It would probably be better if most older people advanced their education outside the college setting with people of their own age.	7	86	0	81
1 P It would probably be better if most older people advanced their education in established educational institutions.	46	25	38	19
2 N There is something different about most older people: it's hard to figure out what makes them tick.	0	100	0	90
2 P Most older people are really no different from anybody else: they're as easy to understand as younger people.	66	7	71	19
3 N Most older adults are so rigid in their accepted views, they are unable to cope with the complexities of current knowledge.	4	93	0	95
3 P Older adults are willing to change their accepted views if they are confronted with convincing data to the contrary.	82	11	90	5
4 N Most older people would prefer to avoid being confronted with new ideas because new concepts confuse them.	14	82	0	81
4 P Most older people are eager to learn throughout their lifetimes.	57	21	76	0

TABLE I (continued)

MATCHED NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE PAIRS

	Attitude Item Response	Group I (N=28)		Group II (N=21)	
		Percent Who Agree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Disagree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Agree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Disagree Strongly or Somewhat
5 N	Most older adults have not kept up with current trends in their areas of expertise.	18	57	9	57
5 P	Older adults are as well versed in their chosen fields of learning as are their younger counterparts.	64	25	57	5
6 N	Most older people would prefer to learn in settings with people their own age.	18	39	5	43
6 P	Older and younger people can cooperate in a learning situation to the benefit of both age groups.	100	0	95	0
7 N	Most older people are out of place in higher education settings.	7	99	9	100
7 P	Most older people adapt well to learning experiences in higher education.	64	4	67	5
8 N	Most older people are too argumentative to succeed in a traditional college classroom.	0	100	0	100
8 P	Older people are inquisitive and highly motivated in the traditional college classroom.	64	14	57	0
9 N	Older faculty members have too much power in colleges and universities.	11	79	14	86
9 P	Older faculty members contribute to a sense of equilibrium on college and university campuses by their judicious use of power.	64	21	33	29

TABLE I (continued)

MATCHED NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE PAIRS

	Attitude Item Response	Group I (N=28)		Group II (N=21)	
		Percent Who Agree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Disagree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Agree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Disagree Strongly or Somewhat
10 N	If older people expect to be liked, their first step is to try to get rid of their irritating faults.	18	75	9	76
10 P	When you think about it, older people have the same faults as anybody else.	96	4	90	5
11 N	Most older people can be characterized as afflicted by muddled thinking.	0	93	0	100
11 P	Most older people are as capable of creative thinking and reasoning as are younger people.	79	14	94	0
12 N	Older people are too easily intimidated by younger people to interact successfully with them in the traditional college setting.	18	46	0	86
12 P	Older adults enjoy the company of younger people and are willing to learn with them in the college classroom.	82	4	67	0
13 N	In order to facilitate the best learning environment, older people should live at home and commute to the nearest higher education institutions if they want to take classes.	21	39	29	9
13 P	The most efficient and successful college learning experiences for older adults would involve their living on college campuses with younger students.	18	46	5	24

TABLE I (continued)

MATCHED NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE PAIRS

	Attitude Item Response	Group I (N=28)		Group II (N=21)	
		Percent Who Agree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Disagree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Agree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Disagree Strongly or Somewhat
14 N	It is foolish to claim that wisdom comes through old age.	50	43	24	62
14 P	People grow wiser as they age.	54	29	57	19
15 N	Most older people are incapable of learning new material fast enough to keep up with higher education classes.	11	71	5	90
15 P	Given sufficient motivation and study outside class, older people can learn new material as well as younger people.	79	7	99	0
16 N	Most older people are not interested in furthering their education because their ideas are set and they are unwilling to change them.	0	93	0	90
16 P	Most older people are capable of learning new ideas and incorporating them into their knowledge base.	86	7	95	0
17 N	Most older people would spend too much time talking about their own personal experiences in the classroom rather than listening to the instructor.	7	93	9	90
17 P	Most older people are eager to learn and listen attentively to classroom instruction.	75	11	86	0

TABLE I (continued)

MATCHED NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE PAIRS

	Attitude Item Response	Group I (N=28)		Group II (N=21)	
		Percent Who Agree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Disagree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Agree Strongly or Somewhat	Percent Who Disagree Strongly or Somewhat
18 N	Most older people are constantly complaining about the younger generation.	14	79	0	76
18 P	One seldom hears older people complaining about the younger generation.	25	43	33	38
19 N	There are a few exceptions, but in general most older people are pretty much alike.	7	93	5	81
19 P	It is evident that most older people are very different from one another.	93	4	86	0

Note: [a]Items are listed in pairs, N representing the negatively worded form and P the positively worded form.

An analysis of the demographic data reveals that a much higher percentage of the Elderhostel instructors were 50 years old or older as compared to the non-Elderhostel teachers (46 percent of G-I were over 50; only 19 percent of G-II were over 50).

The results of the preliminary analysis of the questionnaire contradicts the original hypothesis that increased contact with older adult learners would lead to more favorable attitudes. Although more of the G-I respondents were older adults, they were more critically positive than their younger counterparts. In other words, the older respondents agreed less strongly with very positive statements about older learners. A test for the statistical significance of the overall mean differences yields *t*'s significant beyond the .01 level. On the negative statements, however, there was little significant difference between the two groups. Both groups responded strongly to the negative questions. The responses were uniformly unfavorable to negative stereotypes of older adult learners. For example, even though many of the respondents in G-II were younger instructors, on many of the negative questions they responded similarly to the older instructors in G-I (See Table I, negative responses to Item Pairs 2, 3, 8, 11, 14, and 16).

In Table II the questions have been arranged by negative/positive pairs as well. Of these pairs, significant correlation at the .05 level were found between Item Pairs 3, 4, 8, 11, 14, and 19. It appears from these results that both G-I and G-II are in agreement that older adults can assimilate ideas and incorporate new knowledge into their thinking throughout their lifetimes. Item Pair 11 shows a very high percentage of both groups of respondents (G-I, 80 percent, r_{NP}= .51; G-II, 94 percent, r_{NP}=.55) who agree that older people are as capable of creative thinking and reasoning as are younger people.

TABLE II

MATCHED NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE PAIRS

	Attitude Item Response[a]	Correlation: Group I (N=28) r_{NP}	Correlation: Group II (N=21) r_{NP}
1 N	It would probably be better if most older people advanced their education outside the college setting with people of their own age.		
1 P	It would probably be better if most older people advanced their education in established educational institutions.	.19	.22
2 N	There is something different about most older people: it's hard to figure out what makes them tick.		
2 P	Most older people are really no different from anybody else: they're as easy to understand as younger people.	-.42*	.24
3 N	Most older adults are so rigid in their accepted views, they are unable to cope with the complexities of current knowledge.		
3 P	Older adults are willing to change their accepted views if they are confronted with convincing data to the contrary.	.54*	.45*
4 N	Most older people would prefer to avoid being confronted with new ideas because new concepts confuse them.		
4 P	Most older people are eager to learn throughout their lifetimes.	.43*	.54*
5 N	Most older adults have not kept up with current trends in their areas of expertise.		
5 P	Older adults are as well versed in their chosen fields of learning as are their younger counterparts.	.004	-.13

12

TABLE II (continued)

MATCHED NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE PAIRS

	Attitude Item Response	Correlation	
		Group I (N=28)	Group II (N=21)
		r_{NP}	r_{NP}
6 N	Most older people would prefer to learn in settings with people their own age.	.03	.17
6 P	Older and younger people can cooperate in a learning situation to the benefit of both age groups.		
7 N	Most older people are out of place in higher education settings.	.47*	.42*
7 P	Most older people adapt well to learning experiences in higher education.		
8 N	Most older people are too argumentative to succeed in a traditional college classroom.	.20	.32
8 P	Older people are inquisitive and highly motivated in the traditional college classroom.		
9 N	Older faculty members have too much power in colleges and universities.	.15	.26
9 P	Older faculty members contribute to a sense of equilibrium on college and university campuses by their judicious use of power.		
10 N	If older people expect to be liked, their first step is to try to get rid of their irritating faults.	.09	.10
10 P	When you think about it, older people have the same faults as anybody else.		

TABLE II (continued)

MATCHED NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE PAIRS

	Attitude Item Response	Correlation	
		Group I (N=28)	Group II (N=21)
		r_{NP}	r_{NP}
11 N	Most older people can be characterized as afflicted by muddled thinking.	.51*	.55*
11 P	Most older people are as capable of creative thinking and reasoning as are younger people.		
12 N	Older people are too easily intimidated by younger people to interact successfully with them in the traditional college setting.	.07	.32
12 P	Older adults enjoy the company of younger people and are willing to learn with them in the college classroom.		
13 N	In order to facilitate the best learning environment, older people should live at home and commute to the nearest higher education institutions if they want to take classes.	.22	.29
13 P	The most efficient and successful college learning experiences for older adults would involve their living on college campuses with younger students.		
14 N	It is foolish to claim that wisdom comes through old age.	.63*	.77*
14 P	People grow wiser as they age.		
15 N	Most older people are incapable of learning new material fast enough to keep up with higher education classes.	.18	.46*
15 P	Given sufficient motivation and study outside class, older people can learn new material as well as younger people.		

TABLE II (Continued)

MATCHED NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE PAIRS

Attitude Item Response		Correlation	
		Group I (N=28)	Group II (N=21)
		r_{NP}	r_{NP}
16 N	Most older people are not interested in furthering their education because their ideas are set and they are unwilling to change them.		
		.19	.54*
16 P	Most older people are capable of learning new ideas and incorporating them into their knowledge base.		
17 N	Most older people would spend too much time talking about their own personal experiences in the classroom rather than listening to the instructor.		
		.42*	.13
17 P	Most older people are eager to learn and listen attentively to classroom instruction.		
18 N	Most older people are constantly complaining about the younger generation.		
		.36*	.32
18 P	One seldom hears older people complaining about the younger generation.		
19 N	There are a few exceptions, but in general most older people are pretty much alike.		
		.56*	.29
19 P	It is evident that most older people are very different from one another.		

*Note: The magnitude of r's required for statistical significance is as follows: N = 28, .36 at the .05 level; N = 21, .41 at the .05 level.

[a]Items are listed in pairs, N representing the negatively worded form and P the positively worded form.

Where adaptability to the college environment is being measured, only Item Pair 8 showed a high degree of consistency across the two groups. Both G-I and G-II answered 100 percent "disagree" or "disagree strongly" to the statement that older people are too argumentative to succeed in a traditional college classroom. However, only 64 percent of G-I and 57 percent of G-II "agree" or "agree strongly" with the positive statement of this pair. Therefore, Item 8 does not appear to meet specifications of logical oppositeness despite the fact that it had an r_{NP}=.53 which is significant at the .01 level.

Of the pairs of statements with high correlations, Item Pair 14 and Item Pair 19 showed very high r_{NP} values (Item Pair 14, r_{NP}=.51). The stereotypic attitudes being measured by these pairs are characterized by differences among cognitive styles and individual differences among older adults. Although, on most positive items, G-I was more critical in answering "strongly agree" on Item Pair 19, 93 percent "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that most older people are very different from one another. (This Item Pair is identical to a pair used by Kogan in his original questionnaire. He tested three groups of students and obtained correlation coefficients for the groups of .41, .41, and .33). The results obtained from faculty respondents on this survey indicate an even stronger conviction of the individuality of older persons. When examining responses on the negative statement of Pair 19, G-I showed consistency of response: 93 percent of the older instructors who had a high number of contact hours with older learners "disagree" or "disagree strongly" that most older people are pretty much alike. Only 81 percent of the low contact hours, younger instructors "disagree" or "disagree strongly."

Thus, there is a clear consistency of response on this Item Pair dealing with a stereotyped attitude toward older adults.

Where no significant correlation was found between negative and positive statements, revision of these Item Pairs will be undertaken before the questionnaire is used again. It should be noted, however, that with two exceptions, (Item Pairs 2 and 5) r_{NP} coefficients were entirely within the positive band of the correlational spectrum. Of the 38 r_{NP} values reported in Table II, only 16 are statistically significant at the .05 level or better in the positive, or logically consistent direction.

Summary and Conclusions

A number of attitude surveys about older people have been conducted over the past 30 years. Most of these studies produced results which reinforced the belief that negative attitudes toward older adults are to some degree still prevalent in our society. One recent study (Thomas and Yamamoto, 1975) indicates that more positive attitudes are developing among younger children. It appears from the findings of this preliminary survey that negative attitudes are beginning to be modified not only in young children but also among younger faculty at some colleges and universities in the mid-west. The research results indicate that younger faculty members are less critical about older adults as learners and potential learners than are older more experienced faculty.

A critical finding reveals that older faculty members, with a high number of classroom contact hours with adult learners, express less positive attitudes toward the capabilities of older adults to be successful college students. It is possible that this finding is being confounded by the fact that some of the G-II faculty are older themselves and retain

the stereotypic attitudes toward other older people as incapable of learning beyond a certain period of life. On the other hand, it is possible that our new found optimism about older adults as replacement students for the dwindling traditional students has tempered doubts about their learning capacities. As the younger faculty age, and come in contact with more older learners, their enthusiastically positive attitudes toward older learners may also become more critical.

In summary, it is important to point out that further revision of specific Item Pairs is being pursued in order to develop a more reliable survey instrument. This preliminary study does indicate, however, that younger faculty are less descriminating about older learners in the college setting. Younger faculty also maintain fewer negative stereotypes of older adults as learners. This initial finding suggests that older learners may find less negatively biased attitudes toward their ability to learn among younger faculty members than among older faculty. The preliminary results bode well for the older adult learner in the traditional college setting.

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